# Texas Department of Transportation

Providing safe, effective, and efficient movement of people and goods.

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# Motorists Urged to Keep Vehicle Records Straight

Protect Your Title, Texas Campaign Coincides with National Car Care Month

AUSTIN – April is National Car Care Month, and if you're planning on selling a car or truck in Texas, you need to do more than spruce up the vehicle.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recommends using a screwdriver and computer.

"That's because when you sell your car or truck you need to protect yourself by removing and transferring the license plates, and filing the online Vehicle Transfer Notification," said Rebecca Davio, director of the Texas Department of Transportation's Vehicle Titles and Registration Division. "There's a small fee for transferring the plates, but the Vehicle Transfer Notification is free and doing both of these when you sell or trade in a vehicle should be as routine as changing the oil in your car."

But it isn't. TxDOT estimates less than 1 out of 10 Texans who sell or trade in a vehicle follow the two simple steps that will help to keep them out of trouble.

"It means about a million Texans each year are leaving themselves unprotected and could be held responsible for the vehicle buyer's parking fines, toll violations or red-light camera tickets because they didn't file the Vehicle Transfer Notification and take off and transfer their license plates when they sold their car or truck," Davio said.

As part of car care month, TxDOT wants to remind everyone to "Protect your title, Texas: Your Vehicle Title Needs Maintenance, Too."

Texans often forget that both the vehicle title and license plate number are directly tied to their name. Simply signing the back of the title in a driveway or trading it into a dealer does not change the record of ownership in the state's motor vehicle database. "The only way the state, including law enforcement, can know who owns a vehicle is if you tell us," Davio said

Unfortunately, too many buyers in private sales don't re-title the vehicle, leaving the seller as the recorded owner in the state database. Many Texans also do not realize that when they trade in a vehicle to a dealership, that dealership does not apply to change the title until the vehicle is sold to a customer.

Today, it is common for dealerships to take your vehicle and sell it to another dealership or auction house and while the vehicle may be moving around, the name on the title isn't – you are still the owner of record.

"Our hearts go out to customers who call us to say they are receiving bills for hundreds of dollars in parking fines or red-light camera violations from a Texas city that might be a thousand miles from where they live, and don't understand why." Davio said.

It happened to Tom Frost III, senior executive vice president of Frost Bank, when he traded in a vehicle to a San Antonio dealership. That dealer sent it to a dealership in Austin, which in turn sent it to one in Houston. The vehicle was stolen from the Houston dealership. For two years Frost received letters about toll fines, and calls from police.

"If I had taken five minutes to fill out the Vehicle Transfer Notification then everyone in law enforcement that looked at my old vehicle's record would have seen I sold it and was not responsible for all these problems," Frost said. "Instead, I found myself having to deal with one hassle after another because every time that vehicle was used to run toll booths or break the law, the authorities came looking for me."

There is only a 30-day window from the time you sell or trade in the vehicle to file the Vehicle Transfer Notification to help ensure you won't be held responsible for anything the buyer does with that car or truck. You can find the Vehicle Transfer Notification at www.txdot.gov. Simply type "Vehicle Transfer Notification" into the homepage. When you file the notification electronically, it's important to print out the confirmation page so you have a record of your submission. State law says once you file the form, the buyer becomes the "presumed owner," and that removes your liability for the vehicle.

Best of all, this protection is offered for free. "Two years ago TxDOT removed the fee to file the notification because we believe Texans should not have to pay to protect themselves," Davio said. "Please do not send us any money even if you find a \$5 fee still listed on the back of your title." The fee is printed on titles issued before the charge was removed.

Transferring the license plates from the vehicle you sold to another one you own or bought is your guarantee that the plate number cannot be used by anyone but you. Not only will this keep the buyer of your old vehicle from being able to run up tickets in your name, it also helps to force the buyer to re-title the vehicle. Until the buyer obtains a new title for the vehicle, your name continues to be listed on the title. There is a nominal charge to transfer the plates.

When you take off the license plates, you also need to remove the vehicle's registration sticker. "Remember the registration sticker is customized for your vehicle, and it has the license plate number on it," Davio said.

The buyer can still drive the vehicle if he or she downloads a Vehicle Transit Permit at www.txdot.gov.

There's also another way to protect yourself when you sell a vehicle, Davio added.

"If you're selling your vehicle in a private sale, both you and the buyer can go to the county tax office together to retitle the vehicle," she said. "This way you know the buyer has applied to transfer the title and once the title is in the buyer's name anything done with that vehicle will be traced to the buyer – who will be the person listed on the title. You can also transfer the license plates to another one of your vehicles while you are there."

#### On the Web

In the homepage search engine on www.txdot.gov, type in:

Vehicle Transfer Notification - to notify TxDOT you sold your vehicle.

Protect your title, Texas – to find complete instructions and videos on what you need to do every time you sell or buy a vehicle.

Vehicle Transit Permit – to download a transit permit so you can drive a vehicle that is purchased without the license plates or registration sticker.

### **Facebook**

Join the Protect your Title, Texas conversation on Facebook where you will find the "The Protector" superhero sharing tips about filing the Vehicle Transfer Notification and transferring your license plates. Watch for new updates that will include videos, podcasts and information to help Lone Star motorists better understand how to protect their vehicle's title.

To become a Facebook fan of Protect Your Title, Texas, visit http://tinyurl.com/asmm2l

## The Texas Department of Transportation

The Texas Department of Transportation is responsible for maintaining nearly 80,000 miles of road and for supporting aviation, rail and public transportation across the state. TxDOT and its 15,000 employees strive to empower local leaders to solve local transportation problems, and to use new financial tools, including tolling and public-private partnerships, to reduce congestion and pave the way for future economic growth while enhancing safety, improving air quality and preserving the value of the state's transportation assets. Find out more at www.txdot.gov.